End of Approval Phase Checklist Instructions

A checklist of activities and deliverables that should be completed by the end of the Approval Phase. This checklist can be used during an end-of-phase management review. This is one of a series of end-of-phase checklists, one for each of our representative project phases.

The theme of an end-of-phase management review is to ensure that sufficient work has been completed in the current project phase to allow the project to enter the next phase without an unacceptable increase in project risk. Thus, the checklist is not only for what work was done in last phase, but also for what foundation has been set for the work that is coming next. Projects that don't lay a good foundation in risk reduction activities such as planning, requirements management, design and testing can become overextended in later project phases, increasing the schedule time, cost and risk of the project, and decreasing the fitness for use of the project's result. A checklist that tracks the status of key activities and deliverables in each project phase can help the team and stakeholders decide if a sufficient foundation has been laid in the current project phase to allow the project to continue into the next phase.

The Approval phase is focused on examining/testing/reviewing the nearly-completed project deliverables from the customer's viewpoint and against the original requirements and the company's business case for undertaking the project in the first place. The work includes both internal and external reviews, testing, customer acceptance processes; e.g. for a product development project, does the product work and are costs in line with what the business case required? If developing a service, do the final service definition, steps, and supporting material work for the customer and those who will be delivering the service? For software development, does the software meet its performance and usability requirements? When the project is to plan and prepare for an event, are all elements such as facilities, invitations, and related services in place? The Approval phase should not be the first time the team has done testing or sought out customer feedback. But by the Approval phase, all the important elements should be nearing completion, allowing final affirmation that the project is truly nearing completion. After the Approval Phase comes the Delivery phase, so the exit for the Approval phase must ensure that the company is truly ready for nearing start of delivery to customers.

1. If you are at the beginning of your project, download this checklist and the other end-of-phase checklists and use them to make the general plan for the entire project. If you are in mid-project, examine the checklists of previous phases to ensure that your project is not already overextended. Try to avoid examining these end-of-phase checklists only late in the project phase or on the eve of the end-of-phase project review -- they lose much of their value as a planning tool if not used early.

2. Don't be put off by the number of items on these checklists. They are illustrative of the areas of focus, with example checklist items underneath, for accomplishing the key goals of the phase. Edit these checklists to remove items that don't apply to your particular project and to include additional items that are key gating items in your organization's development or project process. You can also adapt these checklists to your organization's project lifecycle phases -- more on that below. Try to do this editing EARLY in your planning, when you're not under pressure to complete a particular phase. Then hold the checklist steady both during and at the end of the phase -- resist making changes and removing items in order to have a better review.

3. Start actively using each checklist EARLY in the project phase to ensure completeness of the activities and deliverables that you are trying to accomplish during the phase.

4. As part of the end-of-phase review, the checklist should be prepared with either a "YES" or "NO" in the "Done?" column. Items with a "NO" are "punch list" items to be tracked until completion.

The Use of Project Phases

Projects are typically divided into Phases that define logical divisions of the project work over time. Phases also provide the team and management with checkpoints for reviewing project progress and parameters, and determining whether to go further.

The project phase breakdown and names that we use are fairly typical, but by no means the only ones. If your project phases are broken up differently, you can adapt our end-of-phase checklists to your own development or project lifecycle methodology. For example, product development organizations might split the "Execution" phase into two distinct phases of "Design" and "Prototype and Test". Organizations with complex manufacturing may want to have two phases for "Delivery". Other industries may have completely different phases. The point here is that a project lifecycle should have periodic progress reviews where the work to date is examined and the risk of continuing with the project is assessed. Our end-of-phase checklists are meant to support these reviews.

To guide your use of this checklist and its possible adaptation to your own development model, the next section provides our definition of the Approval Phase.

Approval Phase

We call this phase the start of the project endgame. The objective of this phase is to validate that the product or system or new feature meets the customer's requirements as expressed in the Project Vision and all other specifications. During this phase the team measures the product or system's "fitness for use" -- the degree to which the design meets the requirements -- through activities such as performance testing, environmental testing, product reviews, process reviews and customer/user testing. Changes to the design in this phase are often very expensive, and even minor

2

changes to a system or service process design at this point often have a high risk of side effects. Major blocks of activity include:

- **Project Objectives and Business Case met; Completion Criteria:** One of the challenges of this phase is determining when you are done. How do I determine when my design meets requirements? Does "fitness for use" mean that every single product requirement has been satisfied? How does the team make sure that the original business case for the project still holds? How do I mediate between marketing, engineering, quality assurance and production when test results and reviews are generating issues? (Read our paper *Handling the Endgame of a Project,* located in the Papers and Presentations area, to gain some insight on why projects go south during the endgame, what you can do about it while you're in the middle of a bad one, and what you can do early in the next project to avoid bruising endgames.)

  During the Approval Phase the team refines detailed completion criteria such as what kinds of issues must be corrected before release to any customers, which features must absolutely be present, etc. Those criteria are used throughout the phase, including at the transition from internal testing to beta or acceptance testing by a customer and transition from the Approval Phase to the Delivery Phase.

- **Functionality and Completeness "Testing"; Issues Resolution:** During the Approval Phase, both internal and external (customer/user) testing occur to validate that the project's deliverable meets requirements—including functional operation, performance, aesthetics, usability, etc.

- **Operations/Manufacturing/Support and Launch/Deployment Preparation:** Cross-functional groups also continue their production/launch/support work begun in the Execution phase, ramping their activity significantly to prepare for release to customers. During this phase they complete the implementation of marketing, quality and support plans, as well as training materials and classes, support services, and various company and customer documentation. Phase exit criteria for these deliverables must be set as part of planning the phase. So the Approval phase reviews and testing should encompass not just the project deliverables themselves and whether they work, but also whether the company is ready to deploy those deliverables to customers, support them, sell them, educate users, etc. Therefore, the Approval Phase typically includes reviews of all supporting processes and materials—customer service protocols; marketing, sales, and/or user education materials; manufacturing processes and equipment, and so forth—as appropriate for your particular project. Therefore, the Approval Phase Checklist later in this file will include items to make sure ALL the aspects of the projects deliverables are ready.

- **Transition Items:** The team prepares for final issue resolution and plans for the shift of responsibilities from "development" personnel to those who will perform deployment and support – which must occur in earnest in the coming Delivery Phase.

Using the Approval Phase Checklist

As we stated in the Introduction, the purpose of an end-of-phase checklist (and accompanying management review) is to ensure that sufficient work has been completed in the current project phase to allow the project to enter the next phase without an unacceptable increase in project risk. Thus, the checklist is not only for what work was done in this phase, but also for what foundation has been set for the work that is coming next. Projects that don't lay a good foundation in risk reduction activities such as planning, requirements management, design and testing can become overextended in later project phases, increasing the schedule time, cost and risk of the project, and decreasing the fitness for use of the project's result. A checklist that tracks the status of key activities and deliverables in each project phase can help the team and stakeholders decide if a sufficient foundation has been laid in the current project phase to allow the project to continue into the next phase.

The contents of the Approval Phase Checklist help ensure that the project's outputs have been thoroughly reviewed, tested and approved both internally and externally by representative customers or users. We are "approving" that the project's deliverable meets the requirements and is ready for customer deployment. Beyond that, the checklist contents help ensure that all the cross-functional areas necessary to deploy and support the product/system/etc. will be ready at the time of release to customers during the Delivery Phase; and that the overall business case for the project will still be met, based on how costs and risks have evolved.

A caveat regarding the use of end-of-phase reviews and checklists in general: In some cases, all activities and deliverables may NOT be completed at the end of a project phase. The goal of a gating end-of-phase management review is not to rigidly enforce a waterfall development methodology where everything must be completed, approved and signed off before any activities in the next phase can begin. There can be overlap between phases and as much concurrency as possible without exposing the project to unacceptable risk. The point of the gating review is to examine the state of the current phase's activities and deliverables and measure the risk of overextending the project by moving the center of effort of project activities heavily into the next phase at this point in time.

The critical aspects of transitioning from the Approval into the Delivery Phase are:

- Project completion criteria have been agreed to.

- Both internal and external (customer/user) testing have been performed and either the criteria have been met, or remaining issues are understood and assigned for resolution.

- The team has verified that the business case is still being met.

- Cross-functional groups are ready for their activities at the start of the Delivery Phase.

4

If there *is* an Approval Phase activity or deliverable that has not been completed by the end-of-project review, the team and stakeholders may make a consensus decision that there is no severe risk in allowing the project to continue into the next phase as long as the activity or deliverable is completed in a timely way and scheduled to be completed before its absence would raise risk. That said, given the looming beginning of delivery to customers once the Delivery Phase is started, such a decision at the end of Approval Phase should be made with caution.

If this case can be made for the item, then enter a "NO in the "Done?" column and enter the item's completion date in the "Due Date" column. This activity or deliverable is now considered to be on the "punch list", a to-do list of activities that the project manager recognizes as exceptional -- a carefully controlled overextension of the project. These items must be carefully tracked to closure before the end-of-phase review can be considered fully complete. The project manager takes an action item from the end-of-phase review to track each item on the punch list and report the closure of each item. One mechanism for doing this is to amend the review minutes as each punch list item is closed out. Progress on the punch list should be reported regularly and frequently. The review is not considered complete until the punch list has been cleared.

End of Approval Phase Checklist

Add your own explicit items or wording as needed. This particular list shows the kinds of items that are checked for hardware/software development projects. You can edit this list to refer to specific project documents your company creates or key activities involved in reviewing project deliverables prior to the Delivery Phase.

Administrative Information

Revision	Author	Date	Sections Affected	Change Summary
1.0		1/3/2009		

Current Version	1.0
Date	1/3/2009
Master Document Chapter Number	5
Document ID	70